EXAMINATION IN COURTESY WORK

A candidate has applied for admission, been accepted, and has received his E. A. Degree in Lodge "A." He later finds that his occupation calls him to another part of the country, too far away to attend his lodge, but there is a ledge in that town which we will call "B."

Lodge "A," through the Grand Secretary, instructs Lodge "B" to confer the Fellowcraft on before named E. A. as a courtesy to Lodge "A."

Now the question rises, is Lodge "B" required to examine the candidate and satisfy themselves that he has made "suitable proficiency in the preceding degree ? " Or may they without examination confer the F. C. Degree on the order of the Grand Secretary (no mention of examination being made in the Grand Secretary's letter) ?

My personal view is, that having the order from the Grand Secretary, Lodge "B" is perfectly in order to confer the F. C. Degree on the before mentioned E. A. without any examination; but should Lodge "A," through the Grand Secretary, instruct Lodge "B" to confer both F. C. and M. M. Degrees, I claim that Lodge "B" may go ahead and confer the F. C. Degree on the E. A., but before conferring the M. M. Degree, the usual time should elapse and the F. C. brother should satisfy Lodge "B" that he has made "suitable proficiency" in the F. C. Degree before the lodge will confer the M. M. Degree. Am I right or am I wrong ?

Your opinion on these questions will be very much appreciated.

S. H. T., Canada.

A general authoritative answer to a question in regard to procedure is impossible. Brethren are obviously bound by the particular rulings and precedents of their own jurisdiction. We may, however, offer some general reflections on the principles that should govern any decision that may be made.

In the first place the regulation of courtesy work of one lodge for another by Grand Lodge officials is a new thing. It may have grown up partly by the tendency of all governing bodies to continuously enlarge the scope of their powers; and it is quite possible that the general deterioration of self-governing ability in our lodges has made some regulation necessary. That there has been such a deterioration is hardly open to doubt, and it is largely due to the "degree mill." This has gradually changed the conception of Masonic work in the minds of the great majority of Masons on this continent. The Master of a lodge is regarded merely as a "foreman" in charge of the "mill." His function is to know the ritual, and any questions of procedure, of Masonic law or Masonic instruction are out of his province, and must be referred to Grand Lodge experts. Did the lodges arrange such matters as these between themselves directly, as they used to do, such questions as the one under consideration could hardly arise. It would be settled by correspondence simply and naturally.

The principle on which the question should be answered seems quite clear. Examination of proficiency in the formal instructions of one grade is really an integral part of advancement, and always has been. The candidate must be examined if all requirements are to be filled. But there are variations in usage as to the time and place of examination. The standard rule has always been, and still is in many

jurisdictions, that examination should be in open lodge, immediately before the conferring of the next step. Where this is the rule, there really seems to be no question. The examination is to all intent a part of the following degree. Thus it would appear, that unless it be expressly stated and certified that the candidate has been examined and found proficient, that the Lodge "B" should examine him as a matter of course.

Another point arises subsidiary to this, and pointing to the same conclusion. Unless the candidate is vouched for personally, he must be examined to discover whether he be the person to whom the documents refer.

Further than this, examination is nothing that can be objected to by anyone. It is no hardship, if the Mason, of whatever degree, is proficient. And (it is another of the things that have been largely forgotten) it is the duty of the Master (in principle, though now, alas, honored chiefly in the breach of the rule) not only to assure himself of the proficiency of candidates, but of the members of his lodge also, at any and all times.

If the Lodge "B" is under another jurisdiction and there are variations in ritual, there might be some practical difficulties.. But these would be no greater than in examining a visitor. The Master and Wardens, and consequently the Past Masters, of any lodge, ought to be sufficiently conversant with ritual variations to be able to conduct such an examination, and to judge whether the visitor or candidate knew what he had been taught.

It follows from the consideration of the first question, that the second question should also be answered in the affirmative.. Both on the general grounds here advanced and the particular reasons advanced by our correspondent.

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